**Ode on a Grecian Urn**

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[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Keats_urn.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/skins-1.18/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Keats_urn.jpg)

Tracing of an engraving of the Sosibios vase by [Keats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Keats)

"**Ode on a Grecian Urn**" is a poem written by the English [Romantic poet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romantic_poetry) [John Keats](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Keats) in May 1819 and published in January 1820 (see [1820 in poetry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1820_in_poetry)). It is one of his "[Great Odes of 1819](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Keats%27s_1819_odes)", which include "[Ode on Indolence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_on_Indolence)", "[Ode on Melancholy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_on_Melancholy)", "[Ode to a Nightingale](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_to_a_Nightingale)", and "[Ode to Psyche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_to_Psyche)". Keats found earlier forms of poetry unsatisfactory for his purpose, and the collection represented a new development of the [ode](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode) form. He was inspired to write the poem after reading two articles by English artist and writer [Benjamin Haydon](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Haydon). Keats was aware of other works on classical Greek art, and had first-hand exposure to the [Elgin Marbles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elgin_Marbles), all of which reinforced his belief that classical Greek art was idealistic and captured Greek virtues, which forms the basis of the poem.

Divided into five [stanzas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanzas) of ten lines each, the ode contains a narrator's discourse on a series of designs on a Grecian urn. The poem focuses on two scenes: one in which a lover eternally pursues a beloved without fulfilment, and another of villagers about to perform a sacrifice. The final lines of the poem declare that "'beauty is truth, truth beauty,' – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know", and literary critics have debated whether they increase or diminish the overall beauty of the poem. Critics have focused on other aspects of the poem, including the role of the narrator, the inspirational qualities of real-world objects, and the paradoxical relationship between the poem's world and reality.

"Ode on a Grecian Urn" was not well received by contemporary critics. It was only by the mid-19th century that it began to be praised, although it is now considered to be one of the greatest odes in the English language.[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_on_a_Grecian_Urn#cite_note-0) A long debate over the poem's final statement divided 20th-century critics, but most agreed on the beauty of the work, despite various perceived inadequacies.

*Complete the following in your work books.*

**Stanza 1**

1. Define: ravished, Sylvan, deity, mortal, Arcadian, loth, timbrels, ecstasy
2. The speaker of the poem addresses the urn. What qualities does he see in it?
3. What kind of scene does he describe?

**Stanza 2**

1. What do you think the speaker means by “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard/Are sweeter;”?
2. What scene is described in this stanza?
3. How does the speaker comfort the ‘Bold Lover’, who can never achieve his goal?

**Stanza 3**

1. Why are the boughs ‘happy’?
2. What is meant in the last six lines?

**Stanza 4**

1. Define: altar, heifer, garlands, citadel, pious, desolate
2. What scene is described in this stanza?
3. Who is the ‘thou’ in the final line, and why is it ‘desolate’?

**Stanza 5**

1. Why might the urn be a ‘friend to man’?
2. What do you think the final two lines mean?